105 formerly they practiced empollamiento
[846] /5 cont./ /"breeding, hatching"/
[771] (couvade); they have a purely exorcistic, animistic system,
[325] and not a sacerdotal or theistic one; they make metal objects;
[505] they travel in canoes..., they grow and spin cotton and make
[248] complicated weavings with this fiber...; they press yucca with
[283] a basketwork press of characteristic design; they make numerous
[286] objects of a typical and fine basketwork."
[285]

Chapter II

The Land Where the Pemón Indians Live

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10. The general area. 11. The main nucleus of the Gran Sabana. 12. Its location. 13. Climate. 14. Area. 15. Orography. 16. Hydrography. 17. The name Gran Sabana. 18. The name Alto /Upper/ Caroní. 19. The name Serranía de Guayana /Guiana Ridge/. 20. The wealth of this region. 21. The beauties of the same. 22. Caroní and Roroima. 23. Means of communication.

131 10. The tribes of the Pemón language live in the most
101 central part of Guiana in the region of Venezuela, which, /6/ orographically we may call Roroima Mountain (N., S., and W. of same) and hydrographically, Caroní River.

I believe it necessary to repeat that the borders of Indians, like those of birds, are not those designated by international treaties; and thus the Pemón Indians go beyond the borders of Venezuela and also extend into the Brazilian campos of the Branco River and into the forests of British Guiana.

11. There are a group of Pemón who live in Kamarata and Urimán (savannas); a few less live in the forests of the Tiriká, the Caroní, and the Paragua; but the main nucleus of this tribe is located on the Gran Sabana, hence we must

/89 cont./
127 the basins of the Caroní and the Paragua, did not turn up any
162 native settlement of more than 100 individuals, with 99 per cent being of only two or three houses with less than 30 individuals.

900 194. We believe that this state was really that of the majority of the native tribes upon the arrival of the Spanish discoverers and colonizers. And so Columbus says when speaking of Cuba that "we found innumerable peoples and small villages /poblaciones/, but without any government at all." With an author of the history of Cuba, Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, we believe that here as well as there: "No authentic proof can serve us as a basis to support the fact that (Cuba) was divided into extensive provinces, ruled by chiefs or little kings. The maps that have been drawn showing such provinces or districts under caciques are the product of the fantasy of their authors alone."

And the fact is that, aside from the danger of war or when avoiding other evils, in extensive territories with sparse population and easy means of livelihood within the bounds of frugality, grouping in order to provide themselves with greater well-being and more ease takes place slowly by an almost imperceptible process of integration. This is the same phenomenon which we are groping for in the field of international affairs: groupings in war and separation in time of peace, without as yet arriving, after so many centuries of history, at the international society which must come.

• 771 195. For those who are up-to-date on the matters which are usually dealt with in ethnology when discoursing upon the organization of primitive peoples, I should add that among the Pemón Indians there is not the remotest trace of totemism;
582 they practice equally both endogamy and exogamy; and neither
611 does there exist any trace of matriarchy, despite the fact that
[171] the Caribe Indians in general have been classified as belonging to that cultural cycle and as solely exogamous. The couvade,
846 which it has been wished to interpret as proof of matriarchy,
611 through the little which we have said about it when talking about magic, will be seen to be /90/ lacking in probatory value since it affects equally both progenitors.

/92 cont./

797 vogue: fetishistic Indians, without any religion, without family,
114 without morality, worshipers of animals, /93/ trees, rocks, anything." Only by dint of living among them and through observation did we manage to free ourselves of these bad prejudices and as many others about their language, culture, organization, etc. So that our ideas are not to be suspected of being partial.

All of us who have been there, in contact with the reality of facts and very far away from books, have on more than one occasion exclaimed that "the university teaches more of life than the life of the university," and we have quoted the saying, slightly exaggerated, of Nietzche: "Thoughts that arise when walking are the only ones of value." We do not in any way scorn books, but we do not subordinate to them the living reality, which is more varied than all invented systems, but vice versa.

Apart from this, the fundamental ideas were always before us; thus, turning to the comparison between Religion and Language, just as the majority of grammatical categories or organization turn out to be the same, regardless of variation in vocabulary, thus it will also happen in religious categories or phenomenology, regardless of the variety of shadings.

Something, and even a good deal, has been said about the religion of the Indians when dealing with their magic and their
● 771 moral sentiments. For now let it suffice to say that the Pemón
797 Indians are not irreligious nor areligious, they have their own native religion; further, for several generations they have been receiving the influence of our Christian religion, as we have also said about our European culture. Believe me, my dear questioner, "in verbo magistri," since you have been so kind as to call me "Doctor in Pemón"; and it shall be left to the next chapter to develop this most important and thorny question: "What is the religion of the Pemón Indians?"

/94 cont./

760 interrogators, together with the majority of those who discuss it, understand that within the word religion are included these three things: beliefs or dogmas, morality or precepts, and worship or prayers, sacrifices, etc.

204. For a long time there circulated very validly through the lands of America the humoristic saying that the Indians did not have "Dios, ni fe, ni ley, ni rey /God, nor faith, nor law, nor king/." This saying, in addition to being a mnemonic device for remembering the consonants which native languages are apt to lack, also included a satirical intent and meant to say that Indians in general lacked religious organization (God and faith) and social organization (King and Law).

In conversations upon this very subject more than once I have heard it said, making a clever play on words, that the Indians are godless /"los indios son los-sin-Dios/.

771 829 205. In the previous chapter we categorically rejected this statement and we saw, especially, that the proof that the Indians didn't know how to answer whether or not they had any religion nor how to define or explain it is of no value in this matter, since these are theoretical questions for theorists.

To answer directly the question under study there exist two obvious and simplistic answers:

778 782 a) The negative one, which consists of saying: That the Indians do not have idols or images, nor sacred places or buildings, nor offerings or sacrifices, nor persons consecrated to religion.

771 b) The positive one, which runs on a par with the former one and is, like it, simplistic (and into which I confess to having fallen at times through a fondness for synthesis and brevity and through trying to make myself understood by those who are not very versed in these matters), which consists of saying: That /95/ Indians believe in the devil (ancient thesis) or that they are animists (modern thesis).

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Caraca SS

C /95 cont./
114
771 Both answers are included in the Pimentel's statement relative to the Caracas Indians: "They have neither acts of adoration, sanctuaries, house, nor any place dedicated for this; they only have their belief in the devil." In another chapter of this small work, in which we spoke of the piaches, we insisted upon clarifying the point that only in a certain sense could these people be called invokers of the devil.

? 206. My answer, making a tacit comparison between the religious organization and the social organization, is: "That the Pemón Indians have some religious elements or rudiments, but they are disconnected and not interrelated and are little developed." Their organization has not climbed, we have said, above the family level; but neither has it descended from the same. Their religion, we here say, has not arrived at a complete development, but neither is it lacking in the basic or essential elements: a concept of our personal soul, which does not die; our finiteness and dependence; the concept of morality.

To further clarify, using another comparison which is very familiar to me and of which I am fond, I say: That the Pemón Indians have of religion what they have of clothing. It is well known that their garments are limited to a miniscule loincloth /perizoma/ or guayuco, the necessary minimum to protect or cover the modest parts. Well then, their religion, in this aspect, is limited to the natural concept of morality or immorality of certain actions of greater transcendancy in life.

And with regard to dogma, what are the beliefs, legends and stories of the Indians? They are what their necklaces, earrings, bracelets, anklets, garters, wristlets, halos or crowns, feathers, rattles, and paintings are with respect to clothing: "A lot of noise and few kernels"; much beauty, but little protection and utility.

207. Examining now each of the three essential elements, following common opinion, of every religion, I answer:

/95 cont./

776 a) The Pemón do not have an autochthonous idea of a God Creator and Savior of each of his creatures, nor particularly of man. I believe very apt Joubert's statement: "Seeking words, ideas are found," and from it I deduce that, since the Pemón lack any word of their own to say "God," they also lack this concept. And I do remember with no little laughter that the "pra man, there is none," with which /96/ they answered someone who was interrogating them about this, was interpreted as the equivalent of "Brahma."

771 577 b) Their moral code, although it is known, is not made dependent upon a supreme will, nor is it thought that moral actions might have the sanction of a reward or a positive punishment, external and not inherent to the action itself either in this life or in another one, although this life is clearly admitted with regard to its existence but very confusedly regarding its form and manner.

Those who state flatly that "there neither exists dogma without morality, nor morality without dogma," should explain this anomaly. I believe simply that they ought not to exist logically; but from this it cannot be deduced that they do not exist in fact.

782 c) No acts of worship are known of: neither of love and adoration, nor of sacrifice and placation. Neither are images or idols seen, nor anything, in general, of what makes up the external demonstrations of respect to God and his saints.

208. And in lieu of these three essential elements, they have the following:

776 a) A belief that each one of the species of animate and inanimate beings, which exists in the world, has its progenitor or its own primogenital ancestor, endowed with specific qualities, from whom individuals derive their faculties, of whom he is the protector and avenger in a purely physical order. These are the imá, the piá, said in generic form, and the potorí and the pachí, according to whether these ancestors or genealogical trees are considered masculine or feminine.

/98 cont./

●771 210. If we should allow ourselves to be guided by the afore-mentioned currents among those who study religions among the more primitive races, we would say that these aborigines were "worshipers of the natural forces"; but through intimate knowledge of their ideas, I can only say that they are invokers or conjurers of them.

Although it might be with a certain redundancy, I wish to insist still upon explaining what it is that the Pemón Indians understand by these potorí or piá, which form one of the bases of that suprasensible world, and why they invoke them. I believe that by availing myself of some examples, I shall be able to explain this matter.

825 a) The Indians observe, for example, that the wild pig,
789 or váquiro, is not poisoned by eating bitter or poisonous yucca;
955 from this they deduce that the progenitor or first father of the váquiros endowed all of his descendants with a singular force: consequently, when there does occur a chance poisoning due to the ingestion of bitter yucca, they invoke or conjure the piyinké potorí, without thereby believing themselves dependent upon it or inferior to it in other cases.

b) The Indians observe that mice, acures, and other rodents always have hard feces; from this they deduce that their progenitors endowed them with an immunity to intestinal decompositions, diarrhea, etc.: consequently, when they find themselves afflicted with or complaining of these ills, they charm their beverages by invoking the potorí of the afore-mentioned rodents.

825 c) The Indians observe that the araguato /American
789 monkey/, despite being a relatively small animal, has a loud voice; thus when they get hoarse or, besides this, whenever they wish to obtain a powerful and sonorous voice, they invoke the father of the araguatos.

789 d) The Indians observe that sand and ashes absorb a large
755 quantity of water or any other liquid; thus when they wish to

/99 cont./

291 Returning to the comparison with clothing, it can be seen quite clearly that it is not necessary to deprive the Indians of their beads and rustic adornments in order that they may adopt our ways of dressing, which are more useful against the inclemencies of the seasons and biting insects; nor is it necessary that by force we oblige them to dress and to wear footwear; their own need and their own desire stimulate them sufficiently 77/ toward it. Thus, neither more nor less happens to them with religion, since they scarcely have the rudiments of it, they are desirous of completing them with our explanations and teachings.

And to want us, as some would have it, not to give them any religious instruction whatsoever, is like wanting us not to give them clothing for their bodies, nor to explain physics to them, nor that we assist their agriculture, nor give them medicine. Could it perhaps be that life is not worth more than nourishment and the body more than clothing? /100/

Conclusion

Now, to end our ethnographic notes, here is an anecdote of something that happened to me on a certain occasion and at a certain place, the name of which is of no matter. Besieged and roasted by questions on the most varied matters regarding Indians, after I had run out of explanations, I chose to answer everything with the aforesaid "more or less like ourselves." Then one of my questioners, half in jest, struck me this blow: "Father, however much you may say, the most that we shall concede you is that Indians are the animal most similar to man."

I hope that my patient readers will have gotten a slightly higher idea of the Indians in the course of the chapters in which I have tried to study their soul and present it just as I have seen it during my years of living happily among them.

121 collective, and priestly, and, on the other, as animistic, non-ritualistic, individual, and shamanistic. The former are religious in a more limited sense while the latter are predominantly magical as opposed to strictly religious. A given tribe usually shows a mixture of the two general types, sometimes in a single inseparable system with the same individuals acting as priests and shamans, and sometimes in a dual system with the priestly and shamanistic functions differentiated and delegated to different individuals. The Carib religion 771 171 generally and that of the Kamarakotos specifically are almost purely shamanistic.

The Piache.

756 Like most other Caribs, the Kamarakotos have only one sort of mediator with the supernatural and he is technically a shaman, a medicineman, not a priest. I shall call this individual the piache, the common Venezuelan Spanish name, derived from the Carib word which in Kamarakoto is piatsan. There are at least three piaches in the central group of Kamarakotos and there are said to be several more among the more outlying Indians loosely affiliated with this tribe. In their daily lives the piaches are hardly distinguishable from anyone else (see Fig. 75).[1] Their supposed supernatural powers give them no particular additional prestige in civil matters and unlike most Indian priests (as distinct from shamans) they are not powerful political forces in the tribe.

The function of the piache is primarily and almost exclusively medical, but the medical system is spiritualistic or religious and not material. As a physician the piache derives his power not from any actual knowledge of diagnosis and physical treatment but from his ability to commune with and in some degree to control, or at least to influence, the supernatural world. To fulfill these functions, the piache requires knowledge of certain physical tricks, not unlike those of spirit mediums elsewhere, and rote memory of various charms and spells, mostly songs, that are not known to the layman.

To learn this trade the apprentice must be accepted as a colleague by a piache already established and by him be initiated into the secrets of the profession. [785] He is required to fast for a long time, two or three months, drinking only water and eating only as much as is absolutely necessary to sustain life, so that he becomes extremely thin. After this preparation, a definite initiation occurs in which apparently only the initiate and his sponsor are involved. [276] The latter gives the former an infusion of green tobacco in water, which is taken through the nostrils. The initiate becomes unconscious and remains so for some [533] hours, normally about half a day. The piache then sings to the initiate, who, still unconscious or in a trance, eventually sits up and starts singing also. When he returns to normal, he is a piache in his own right. The exact details of this and other procedures and the texts of the songs are closely guarded secrets

[1] [For Fig. 75 see p. 228b, category 116 - Analyst]

754 all, in human guise, are recognized as being supernatural beings and not really
776 human. Others are spirits that can materialize in almost any form, and still others are wholly invisible and formless supernatural beings or even represent a supernatural influence that is hardly thought of as possessing individuality or personality. Even these indefinite distinctions hardly seem to be very clear-
● 771 ly present in the Indian mind. In a broader sense, kanaima is the evil princi-
778 ple of the universe and its manifestations are endlessly protean and essentially indefinable, an idea approaching the Polynesian mana (see Karsten's discussion, which, however, does not include an explicit understanding of more specific aspects of Carib kanaima).

778 Anything unexpected, a noise, a light, a branch falling, an unusual bird,
781 a sudden shadow, may be greeted with the cry of "kanaima," a word that is
822 heard constantly on Indian lips, both jokingly and fearfully. In general anything that startles them and that is not immediately explicable by some normal and expected cause is kanaima, and this is obviously related to their real fear of being startled and to their efforts to avoid startling others.

778 Even this does not exhaust the aspects of kanaima, for it includes true
754 spirit-possession. Kanaima, or a kanaima, may enter the body of a victim and remain there, notably in the chest, causing fever and eventual death unless exorcized.

755 This spirit-possession is essentially related to the duties of the piache in averting the effects of kanaimaton, for medically his most important role is that of exorcist. Fortunately no case occurred during our stay, but the general
[276] procedure was reliably outlined to me by Indian eye-witnesses. The piache makes an infusion of green tobacco in water and snuffs this until he is thoroughly "drunk." He then gives a great leap into the air and disappears. Informants have no idea where he goes, but this is always done inside a house at night with the fires low or extinguished, and one can assume that he somehow climbs in-
[352] to the rafters. After a time he reappears and sits on his bench. This bench,
[532] called murei, is unlike the ordinary bench, aponoi?, being higher and carved into animal form (Fig. 76). He holds in his hands sticks and rolls of leaves and beats time on the ground with these while he sings.[174] Soon the piache is surrounded by a ring of light. My witnesses said that this was not visible to them but only to the piache, who presumably told them that it was there. Then the kanaima appears standing on the chest of his victim and is also visible only to the piache, who asks the kanaima to abandon his prey. The kanaima's reply is told to the sufferer and if it is affirmative recovery follows within two days. If it is negative, the patient inevitably dies.

754 The Kamarakotos believe that kanaimaton have now been fairly well cleared out around Kamarata by the piaches, but that some still invade the
[824] region and that they are still common in the Gran Sabana. The favorite haunts
[361] of kanaimaton, at least around Kamarata, are the forests and this is the

174 [see footnote on p. 328, category 116 - Analyst]

Typical hunting magic with a
224 maraka and a song-spell appears in the Legend of Maichak on another page
[773] (the episode of the second magic implement, stolen by Maichak from an armadillo). It is reasonable to assume that this represents magic once really used by mortals, but it is merely inherited by the Kamarakotos as part of the story and is not used by them. They do employ two very curious but typically Carib
[824] magic means of increasing proficiency in hunting. One of these is to insert a cord of twisted moriche fibers into one nostril and to pull it out through the
[304] mouth. The other is to scarify the skin of the arms and then to rub in a crushed
[824] plant, called kumi, which is sometimes especially grown for this purpose. Our hunters ruefully admitted that none of the Kamarakoto hunting magic is really very effective.

General Religious Ideas.

773 Most of the myths, including the several that together make up the story of Maichak as given in this report, abound in unnatural and supernatural events and beings. To this extent, as well as to the extent that they embody explanations of natural phenomena and of creation, they include ideas usually related to religion. It would, however, be misleading to suppose that they form or assume the existence of any coherent or fixed body of religious doctrine. They are simply stories, fairy tales if one wishes, in which the non-natural is taken for granted.

776 There is firm belief in the existence of spirits, mostly inimical, of whom Piaima is typical and is the most important. Piaima and the kanaimaton are still very much in the Indians' minds. Various other spirits are believed to exist but are seldom thought of and few of the Indians can even name any of them.
● 77 Such simple theology as the tribe may have possessed seems largely to have
[178] broken down and to have been forgotten except as it has a practical bearing on
[282] their lives, which means except as it relates to illness and misfortune. Prayer,
[287] or any form of communication with the supernatural, seems to be unknown except as already suggested for the piaches.

In this rudimentary and probably degenerate system, misfortune is adequately explained by kanaima. Evil and sin do not appear to be considered supernatural or unnatural and there is no evident moral or ethical relationship of religion to their lives, which undoubtedly goes far to explain (or at least is correlated with) their carefree, happy, and, in a sense, sinless lives. They do not have any burden of original sin to bear. Felicity is considered a normal state for which no thanks are due to powers on high. I could not learn that they have any planting or harvest gods or ceremonies, which seems curious in an agricultural people.

775 No clear-cut statement of indigenous doctrine regarding the soul and life after death could be obtained, the usual statement being that "we don't know

775 anything about such things," or "I never have thought about that." One informant said that the "wild, ignorant Indians," i.e. those unlike himself, used to believe in the surviving souls both of men and of animals and that the souls lived in the house of God, but that "intelligent Indians," i.e. those like himself, do not know whether this is so or not. The pseudo-Christian idea of survival in the house of God probably indicates that this is not a reliable statement of indigenous belief, even though it was disclaimed by the speaker and ascribed to the savages.

177 There are some slight traces of Christian influence, but these have not
● 771 significantly affected the thought or life of the people and cannot be considered as the cause of the degeneration of native belief. The two or three Spanish-speaking Indians have acquired with that language a knowledge of the existence of the Christian religion and they show some tendency to wish visitors to believe that this doctrine is known and revered here, mainly because they think it an indispensable adjunct of civilization and dislike being considered uncivilized. One or two individuals claim to have been baptized, which is probable since they have lived in Venezuelan towns, and even to have baptized children themselves, which is not probable. They were, however, unable to explain any item of Christian doctrine, even the meaning of baptism, and I could not learn that this knowledge extends beyond the superficial aspects of that sacrament and recognition of the cross as a Christian symbol. At least one woman has a holy medal, which she wears as others do silver coins and which seems to have
[764] no more meaning for her. Several crosses have been erected on graves and one
[581] in front of the abandoned house of a dead man. In one place crosses were scratched at random on a mud wall, along with various profane sketches. There seems to be a receptive attitude toward Christianity and certainly no hostility, but this certainly is largely due to lack of any realization of how antagonistic that religion is to their present mode of life and habits of thought. For instance, at least one of those who expressed himself as most anxious for the introduction of Christianity is happily married to several wives.

771 As will by now be apparent, their own religion is almost completely non-ritualistic. It involves no true cult, no sacrifices or offerings, no religious buildings or altars, no images or other sacred objects, nothing in the nature of primarily religious services or ceremonies, no real worship, and no propitiation except as a few of the piache's activities might be so considered in a very broad sense. The contrast with the highly ceremonial and theistic Indian religions of the Andes, of Mexico, and of many other parts of North America is almost as great as can be.